. . . a plan of action

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PREFACE

Children entering school in 1991 will graduate from high school after the year 2002. The world that our children are encountering today and in the future is rapidly changing. Alberta is experiencing fundamental changes in its economic, social and cultural fabrics. And the emergence of a highly competitive and integrated global economy, rapid technological innovation, and an expanding knowledge base will continue to have profound impacts on all our lives.

These changes pose significant challenges and opportunities to everyone involved in the education of our young people: to ensure ongoing improvements to the quality of Alberta's educational system to meet the changing needs of students and society. And we must do this in ways which make the best possible use of our available resources.

"To build a strong future for Alberta's young people, we need to take a quantum leap forward. And we need to take it now."

With those words, Jim Dinning, Minister of Education, outlined a new vision for education. A vision for education in the 1990's.

Why a quantum leap? Physicists describe a quantum leap as a sudden change of a particle from one discrete energy level or state to another. Making this change requires an exact amount of energy. If the input energy is insufficient, the leap or transition cannot be made.

What does this mean for education?

It means fundamental change. It means moving forward in bold new directions. It means focusing on results.

Education is the key to our young people being full partners in shaping a global future ... in shaping our province's and our nation's future. Business and community leaders, parents, and people from all walks of life are saying that if we want to be able to compete in the world of the future, we need to lay that groundwork now. And that groundwork comes from an education system which is second to none.

Alberta's education system is a good one. But it is not as good as it could be or must be. And good simply is no longer good enough - for students and for the future of the province.

Such a quantum leap will require focused energy and commitment ... not only of people in the school system but of all Albertans. We must all make education our business and excellence in education our goal if we are to succeed in putting Alberta's students at the top.

Vision and Action

The vision for education sets a direction. It builds on the strengths of Alberta's schools. But most importantly, it describes the end point - what our education system should look like after we've taken that quantum leap forward.

Excellence for all students is what the vision is all about. It's a vision for education that focuses on goals, results, and accountability. The vision provides an agenda for where we need to focus our efforts to prepare all our young people today and for the future.

The vision sets the stage for action. How do we make the vision a reality? What actions can and must we take in order to implement the vision and move us forward to achieving those goals?

Over the past few months, work has been underway to transform the vision into a plan of action. It's a plan of action for the 1990's that can and must be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. Clearly, we need to keep adapting and working with the plan during the 1990's.

The initiatives in this Action Plan describe improvements that will help to ensure all our young people get the education they need. These initiatives reflect Alberta Education's leadership role in developing programs for students, in setting standards and directions for education and expectations for our partners, and in supporting improvements that meet students' needs better.

This Action Plan focuses on initiatives that have high potential for improving student learning.

The Plan outlines a series of related improvements affecting all parts of the education system at all levels. There is no single initiative that is capable of making the changes needed in education. The "big bang" theory of change and improvement does not work. Rather, a sustained effort in a number of areas is required to make significant and lasting improvements in education.

No one person or organization can accomplish all of the initiatives in the Plan. These initiatives require the efforts and energy of lots of different people and organizations - business, industry, media, the professions as well as our traditional partners.

Some of the initiatives in the Plan are Alberta Education's responsibility, many are the joint responsibility of the department and school jurisdictions, and others are expectations for action by other partners. All of our partners have a big role in determining how initiatives will be accomplished, and how to adapt them to different needs and circumstances.

In the months ahead, there will be ongoing discussion with all partners about the vision statement, this Action Plan, and implementation steps.

We will regularly ask and report what is being done and what has been achieved. We will share the information required to assist in assessing our mutual progress on achieving the results and improving the education for Alberta students. And we will transform the vision into achieving our mission.

"The best possible education for all Alberta students"

Alberta Education Mission Statement

September, 1991

VISION FOR THE NINETIES

The vision of education outlined by the Minister of Education, Jim Dinning, in November, 1990 sets an agenda for action throughout the 1990's. This vision statement has driven the development of the initiatives in this Action Plan.

Excellence for ALL students

- All of our children will get the education they need to succeed. They will become the best they can be ... the best technicians, artists, nurses, electricians, business people and parents. Every single student will be the best they can be.

Challenging our most capable kids

- Our brightest and most capable children will be challenged to excel and to achieve the best. Alberta's young people will take their rightful place in shaping the future of Canada, and the world.

Improving our results

- Our students will be at the top on national and international test results. Within Alberta, we will set high standards and we will make significant improvements on diploma and achievement results. And we'll make sure that parents and the public know about the results we're achieving.

- Every child will learn to read, write, compute and yes ... to spell.

- Kids will stay in school. I want to see our drop-out rate decrease by 10 percent this year. And in the longer term, no student will leave school before he or she is ready - ready to work, ready to continue their studies, ready to make a positive contribution to society. Programs will be designed for students and schools will be a place where students want to be.

- Our first Canadians, Native children, will achieve success in schools which recognize their unique culture and values. Results for Native students will equal the results of all other Alberta children.

- Children new to Canada – new to our language, our culture, our way of life – these children will get the skills they need to become full partners in Canada.

Disabled students taking their full place ... integrated into our schools

- Debates over integration or segregation of disabled children will be a thing of the past. Our focus will be on doing what's best for these kids ... developing their full potential. Integration will give them the chance they need ... to learn, to grow, to become full participants in our schools and in our society. Only for a small few will specialized programs be required to meet their complex medical and learning needs.

Equity in opportunity

- All students will have the programs and opportunities they need to succeed and achieve ... regardless of where they live ... regardless of the wealth of their community. Our education finance system will make equity a reality.

Building a strong future in science

- All students will have more science ... a better understanding of science and what it means in our world. We will see a three-fold increase in students choosing careers in science.

Building partnerships with parents, businesses and communities

- All schools will welcome parents to be fully involved in their children's education. Every school will have an active and purposeful school council. Parents will support their schools and teachers, helping them achieve their mutual goals. All schools will have dynamic partnerships with businesses and other community groups.

ACTION PLAN INITIATIVES

SUPERIOR STANDARDS AND RESULTS

High Standards, Improved Results: Our standards must be the highest in Canada and among the highest in the world. We must ensure that Albertans are well informed about the results our students are achieving.

Improve Student Achievement Standards

- develop and clearly specify high standards of what we expect students to know and be able to do in all areas of study so that all students are challenged to achieve

Improve Student Testing and Evaluation

- assist school jurisdictions and teachers to improve their assessment of students and use student results to make instruction more specific to the needs of each student
- help school jurisdictions, schools, and teachers to assess a broader range of student learning provincially and locally (e.g. performance-based assessment including portfolios of student work, writing in math and science, group projects, open-ended and problem-solving questions on tests)

Improve Our Focus on Results and Accountability to Albertans

- develop provincial indicators and measures to assess and make ongoing improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of the educational system
- provide Albertans with regular reports on educational standards, and on the performance of students and the education system – about what is working well and what needs to be improved
- assist school jurisdictions to develop and implement local indicators and measures to help assess and make improvements to education
- use technology more efficiently and effectively to improve the gathering and reporting of educational information, and to improve operational functions

Implement a Province-Wide Student Information System

- implement a province-wide student information system so that we have solid information about students' progress and participation in school and can use that information to make needed changes and improvements

Provide Leadership in National Educational Standards and Participate in International Testing

- provide leadership in the development of national indicators and standards to assess and report on the achievement of Canadian students (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada School Achievement Indicators Program)
- participate in international testing projects to assess and report how well student achievement in Alberta compares with other places in the world

Results Expected:

- Alberta's student achievement standards are among the highest in the world
- Alberta students attain superior results
- Albertans are provided with timely and useful information on how our student results compare nationally and internationally
- Albertans are well informed about educational standards and results and have confidence in education

EXCELLENCE IN CURRICULUM

Curriculum Focuses on Student Learning: Our curriculum must set high expectations for what our students need to know and be able to do in our changing world. Our programs and learning resources must support the achievement of these high expectations.

Develop and Implement Career and Technology Studies

- develop Career and Technology Studies to provide students with a combination of academic and practical skills as preparation for future study and careers in highly skilled and technical fields

Implement Results-Based Curriculum

- clearly specify levels of what we expect students to learn throughout the provincial curriculum to foster continuity in student learning, to inform parents and other partners about student progress, and to demonstrate our high expectations for our graduates

Implement Specialized Diplomas and Awards of Excellence

- provide high school diplomas and awards of excellence which recognize student accomplishments in all areas of study (e.g. humanities, sciences, fine arts, business, career and technology studies)

Provide a More Integrated Curriculum

- integrate concepts, skills, and subject matter across the curriculum to help students understand the relationships among different subjects and to apply these understandings
- assist school jurisdictions to provide more recognition for student learning that occurs outside the school

Increase Focus on European and Asian Languages and Cultures

- school jurisdictions should offer a wider range of programs and courses in European and Asian languages and cultures to foster the success of our students internationally
- develop more programs and courses in Asian languages and cultures to improve the ability of our students to compete successfully in the world economy

Results Expected:

- Alberta's curriculum standards are among the highest in the world: the standards clarify what students are expected to learn, and this enables teachers to focus their teaching efforts on helping each student achieve these high educational standards
- Parents, the business community, and the public are well informed about student learning expectations and achievements
- High school graduates have the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to be successful in the workplace, in Alberta, in Canada, and internationally
- High school graduates are well prepared for the challenges of universities, colleges, technical institutes, and other post-secondary training
- All students are well prepared for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and daily life in a changing society

STRONG BASIC SKILLS

Students Learn Basic Skills: We must ensure that all students develop strong skills in reading, writing, computing, and spelling. These are the foundation for the higher level skills students need in our rapidly changing world.

Enhance Programs for At-Risk Pre-school Children

- implement early intervention programs for at-risk pre-school children and their parents to ensure the children get the skills they need to learn and achieve better (e.g. Head Start)

Emphasize Basic Skills Across the Curriculum

- help school jurisdictions, schools and teachers to ensure the development of basic skills, including math, interpersonal, and communication skills, such as speaking, debating, spelling and writing, is emphasized across all areas of study throughout education

Implement Diagnostic Reading and Math Programs

- help teachers assess students' strengths and weaknesses in reading and math and make instruction more specific to the needs of each student

Improve Students' Language Skills

- work with school jurisdictions to meet the language needs of students whose first language is neither English nor French

Improve Students' Thinking Skills

- assist school jurisdictions to focus more on helping students develop conceptual, analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills, learn how to learn, and apply these skills in everyday life

Results Expected:

- Young children at risk are provided with a full range of educational and support services to ensure that they have a fair and equitable chance to succeed at school
- All students have a solid foundation in reading, writing, computing, and spelling, and are able to think and apply their knowledge
- All students communicate well verbally and in writing

STUDENTS STAY IN SCHOOL

Students Get the Education They Need: All students must stay in school to get the education they need for citizenship and to be successful in work, training, and further education.

Enhance Programs for Students at Risk

- help school jurisdictions to implement programs that improve basic skills, attendance, self-concept, and educational and career goals of primary and secondary school at-risk children (e.g. High Needs Program, mentorship, peer support, and parent programs)
- improve the coordination of programs and services provided by government and community agencies for students at risk and their families

Develop and Implement Career and Technology Studies

- develop Career and Technology Studies to provide students with a combination of academic and practical skills as preparation for future study and careers in highly skilled and technical fields

Implement Specialized Diplomas and Awards of Excellence

- provide high school diplomas and awards of excellence which recognize student accomplishments in all areas of study (e.g. humanities, sciences, fine arts, business, career and technology studies)

Implement Provincial Stay-in-School Strategy

- target significant annual reductions in the dropout rate
- distribute grants in ways that encourage school jurisdictions to reduce student attrition
- develop, in cooperation with school jurisdictions, improved ways of defining and reporting student dropout rates, identifying the reasons why students leave school, and what needs to be done to help students stay in school

Improve Programs and Opportunities for Students

- ensure student programs are relevant to the needs and interests of students and the needs and expectations of Alberta's society and economy
- school jurisdictions should ensure that all students have opportunities to develop their interests, strengths, and talents and understand the importance of completing their high school education

Improve Strategies for Student Re-entry

- assist school jurisdictions to help student dropouts complete high school

Results Expected:

- More students stay in school and graduate; the dropout rate decreases
- Students at risk stay in school and are challenged to excel and achieve their best
- Students have a broader range of opportunities and are recognized for excellence in all areas

SUCCESS FOR NATIVE CHILDREN

Native Children Achieve Success in School: Our Native students must be challenged to excel and achieve their best.

Improve Language Skills

- work with school jurisdictions to provide English as a Second Language Programs to improve the English language skills of Native students
- school jurisdictions should provide Native students with more instruction in Native languages in the early years of education

Implement More Culturally Sensitive Programs and Services

- school jurisdictions should ensure Native culture and values are reflected in programs and services developed for Native students, and that all students develop a better understanding of Native culture and values

Enhance Coordination of Programs and Services for Native Children

- assist school jurisdictions to implement coordinated programs and services for Native children aimed at improving access, attendance, achievement, parental involvement, and preparation for citizenship, the workplace, and post-secondary education

Increase the Supply of Native Teachers

- increase, in cooperation with school jurisdictions and post-secondary institutions, the supply of well-trained Native teachers

Increase Native Involvement

- school jurisdictions should increase Native involvement in the education of their children
- school jurisdictions should increase involvement of Native parents and other Native people in education programs and in the operation of schools that serve Native students

Results Expected:

- Native students are well prepared for citizenship, for success in the workplace, and for the challenges of post-secondary education
- Schools meet the needs and interests of Native students
- More Native students graduate from high school
- Native people are satisfied with their involvement in education
- All students have a better understanding of Native culture and values

SUCCESS FOR IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

Children New to Canada Take Their Full Place: Our immigrant students must get the skills they need to participate fully in our society.

Improve English as a Second Language Programs

- work with school jurisdictions to improve the English language development of students new to Canada through effective English as a Second Language programs

Improve Coordination of Services for Immigrant Children

- improve inter-departmental and inter-agency coordination and assist school jurisdictions to provide school-based support services for immigrant children and their families

Support Involvement of Parents of Immigrant Students

- assist school jurisdictions to offer pre-school, parenting, and language programs to support the educational and social integration of immigrant children and their parents
- school jurisdictions should encourage parents of immigrant students to be more involved in the education of their children

Enhance Services for Immigrant Students

- school jurisdictions should provide more services in a student's first language to foster learning and participation while the student acquires basic English language skills
- school jurisdictions should be more attentive to the learning needs of immigrant students and their parents to help them adjust better to Alberta and Canadian society

Results Expected:

- Immigrant students are well prepared for citizenship, for success in the workplace, and for the challenges of post-secondary education

DOING WHAT'S BEST FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

Meeting The Needs of Disabled Students: Integration into the regular classroom must be the norm for disabled students and will give them the chance they need to learn and to become full participants in our schools and in our society. Our focus must be on doing what's best for disabled students – developing their full potential.

Develop and Implement an Integration Policy

- develop and implement an integration policy for Alberta's students
- assist school jurisdictions to implement and evaluate the integration policy for special needs students and to share information on successful programs and practices
- ensure parents of special needs students are involved in decisions affecting their child's education and, where disagreements occur, ensure that the appeals system effectively meets the needs of students

Improve Coordination of Services for Special Needs Students

- improve inter-departmental and inter-agency coordination and assist school jurisdictions to provide school-based support services and resources for special needs students

Support Improved Staff Skills for Special Needs Students

- help school jurisdictions with training and development activities and provide support materials that improve the ability of all school staff to deal more effectively with special needs students

Make Schools Barrier-Free

- ensure all schools provide a barrier-free environment

Results Expected:

- Special needs students are full participants in our schools and in our society
- Government and community agencies coordinate their services more effectively so that special needs students have the supports they need to develop their full potential
- Teachers have the training, support, and learning resources they need to integrate special needs students
- All schools are accessible to disabled persons
- Parents, students and teachers are satisfied that students with special needs are well served

CHALLENGING OUR MOST CAPABLE STUDENTS

Achieving and Excelling: Our brightest and most capable students must be challenged to excel.

Establish Public and Private Specialized Schools

- establish, with the help of business and the professional community, specialized public and private schools in areas of study such as science and technology, fine arts, and business to enlarge student opportunities to achieve excellence in a variety of endeavours

Improve Programs and Opportunities for Capable Students

- develop challenge programs that are accepted for credit by Alberta's post-secondary institutions
- assist school jurisdictions to develop better ways of delivering programs and services that meet the diverse learning needs of gifted and talented students
- school jurisdictions should foster more leadership opportunities for gifted and talented students in schools and in the community

Provide More Recognition of Student Excellence

- provide more recognition of student accomplishments and excellence in all areas, including humanities, sciences, fine arts, business, career and technology, athletics, leadership, and citizenship

Results Expected:

- Our most capable students are challenged and develop their talents to the fullest; they meet and exceed the academic standards of the best post secondary institutions in the world
- Students are recognized for excellence in a broad range of endeavours
- Specialized schools enlarge the opportunities for students to develop their strengths and talents

EXCELLENCE IN SCIENCE

Building a Strong Future in Science: Our students must have strong backgrounds in science, be more enthusiastic about careers in science, and be able to use science and technology to understand and improve society and the world.

Improve Programs and Opportunities in Science

- improve science programs to develop stronger student interest, higher achievement, and specialized skills in science
- encourage school jurisdictions, schools, and teachers to work more with the science community to improve student learning and interest in science careers (e.g. work with leaders and researchers in science/ technology industries, universities, and other science centres)
- encourage business to provide more science and technology career opportunities for students with science backgrounds

Establish Science and Technology Schools

- establish, with the help of business and industry, public and private science and technology schools to encourage high student achievement, opportunities in science, and selection of science careers

Develop World-Class Science Facilities

- make science facilities in Alberta schools world class

Improve Teacher Expertise in Science, Math, and Technology

- work with business, industry, professional organizations, and post-secondary institutions to provide effective inservice and professional development on a regional basis for primary and secondary science, math, and technology teachers

Support "Lighthouse" Schools and Programs

- recognize "lighthouse" schools and programs for science and technology to foster more innovation and excellence in science education

Results Expected:

- Alberta students excel in science, and are prepared for post-secondary education and successful careers in science
- More students pursue careers in science, and this improves Alberta's competitiveness in the world economy
- Schools, business, and the science community work together effectively to improve science education

Teachers Are Key: We must support and empower teachers to meet the diverse and changing needs of students and to improve student results.

Revise Teacher Certification Requirements

- revise teacher certification requirements to ensure that they reflect the most current knowledge about effective teaching practices

Improve Teacher Effectiveness

- use training and professional development activities to improve the ability of teachers to assess student learning needs and achievements and to use these results to adapt their teaching practices to meet the needs of individual students
- school jurisdictions should provide teachers with more opportunities to work with people whose different skills help improve the education students receive (e.g. clerical, professional, paraprofessional, and technical)
- school jurisdictions should find practical ways to increase the involvement of the community and business people in improving student learning
- improve coordination with universities to enhance teacher preparation and professional development

Increase the Supply of Well-Trained Teachers

- increase, in cooperation with school jurisdictions and post-secondary institutions, teacher supply in northern and rural Alberta and in specialties needed throughout the province

Results Expected:

- Alberta's teaching force is exemplary in its knowledge and practice; this is reflected in student performance that is second to none
- Teachers are better able to match their teaching strategies to the unique learning needs of each student
- Teachers are satisfied that their professional development opportunities improve their teaching practices
- Classrooms throughout Alberta and in all specialty areas have well-trained teachers

Schools Focus on Student Learning: Our schools must serve the needs of all students and improve all students' opportunities to achieve excellence.

Foster Excellence in Student Learning

- assist school jurisdictions to provide a range of programs so that all students are challenged to achieve
- school jurisdictions should help all school staff create a school environment that motivates and supports excellence in learning and achievement for all students
- school jurisdictions should expand their use of approaches that encourage students to take more responsibility for their learning
- encourage the greater use of technology in schools in ways that help to challenge and motivate students and improve their learning

Enhance School-Based Coordinated Services

- improve inter-departmental and inter-agency coordination and assist school jurisdictions to improve the availability of a range of coordinated, school-based family and community services to enhance teaching and learning (e.g., health, social, and recreational services offered by other agencies and organizations)

Improve Community Involvement and Use of Schools

- school jurisdictions should involve parents and the community more to improve the education students receive
- encourage school jurisdictions to expand opportunities for school buildings to serve a wider range of student, family, and community needs (e.g. year-round education, availability of courses to working students, career centre, before and after-school care)

Results Expected:

- Schools coordinate and make effective use of a variety of provincial, municipal and community programs and services to meet the needs of their students and parents better
- Schools are exciting and stimulating places in which students learn and take more responsibility for their learning
- Schools provide the programs that meet the needs of all students

EQUITY OF OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS

More Equitable Access to Educational Opportunities: All of our children, regardless of their social or cultural background or the wealth of the community in which they live, must have equitable opportunities to get the education they need. School jurisdictions must have more equitable access to the fiscal resources they need to provide the best possible education for their students.

Improve Fiscal Equity

- ensure all school jurisdictions have more equitable access to the fiscal resources required to meet students' needs and develop their abilities

Support More Flexible Program Delivery

- encourage school jurisdictions to use more flexible schedules and structures to expand access to education:
  - increase the use of distance learning technology
  - pilot year-round education
  - improve access to education for students who need to work
  - provide greater availability of evening, weekend, and summer programs

Improve School Jurisdiction Effectiveness

- encourage more consortia and cooperation among school jurisdictions to enhance student programs and services, teacher recruitment and inservice, and to manage resources more effectively
- support the amalgamation of school jurisdictions to improve efficiency and effectiveness

Improve the Use of Technology to Enhance Teaching and Learning

- encourage greater use of technology to enhance teaching, expand learning opportunities, and help improve student learning

Implement the Language Education Policy

- implement the Language Education Policy for Alberta to ensure students' language needs are met
- assist francophone students to access programs in their own language in keeping with the right of their parents to exercise this choice

Results Expected:

- All schools have access to the resources required to provide equitable opportunities to all students, regardless of where they live and regardless of the wealth of their community
- Albertans are satisfied with the quality of education
- Francophone students have better access to programs in their own language
- School jurisdictions work together more effectively to improve education

Dynamic and Productive Partnerships: All who have a stake in a successful education system – students, parents, business leaders, educators, and other community members – must work together to make education better for our students.

Support Increased Parent Participation and Responsibility

- make sure all parents are well informed about educational standards and results, are more actively involved in education, and are given more say in decisions affecting the education of their children
- school jurisdictions should ensure that every school has an active and purposeful school council

Increase Business and Professional Community Involvement in Education

- the business and professional community should become well informed, clarify their expectations for student learning, and be more actively involved in education (e.g. provide students with more learning opportunities in the workplace, teacher exchange programs, people from business and other professions helping in the classroom)
- work together with the business and professional community to facilitate the transition of students into the workplace
- employers should make education a top priority and accept more responsibility for improving educational results (e.g. give employees time off to become involved in schools and their children's education, provide employees with parenting programs, work site day care)

Increase Stakeholder Involvement throughout Education

- involve all those who have a stake in a successful education system, including students and former students, in improving the relevance, coordination, and evaluation of programs and services for students

Encourage Consortia

- encourage school jurisdictions to work together to enhance student programs and services, teacher recruitment and inservice, and to manage resources more efficiently

Improve Linkages with Post-Secondary Institutions

- work together with post-secondary institutions to facilitate the transition of students into colleges, universities, and technical institutes

Results Expected:

- Parents are more actively involved in decisions affecting the education of their children
- Parents, the business and professional community, students, and other stakeholders are well informed about educational standards and results, and are actively involved and supportive of education; this improves the education that students receive
- There are more joint efforts among school jurisdictions to improve education

PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

PRIORITIES

This plan of action establishes a broad agenda for change and improvements in the education our students receive. It is built on the assumption that there aren't five big steps that can be taken to achieve the results we need. Instead the plan outlines close to a hundred smaller steps, all of which, when taken together over time, will result in the quantum leap we need to make the vision a reality.

It's important to set priorities. While action will continue on all of the items outlined in the plan, several of the initiatives are key ones which we must address as a first priority.

For the next two to three years, priority will be placed on the following actions:

Achieving Superior Standards and Results

Our standards must be the highest in Canada and among the highest in the world. Albertans must be well informed about our standards and the results our students are achieving. To achieve these objectives, priority will be placed on:

- developing and clearly specifying high standards of what we expect students to know and be able to do in all areas of study so that all students are challenged to achieve
- assessing a broader range of student learning provincially and locally by using more portfolios of student work, group projects, writing in math and science, open ended and problem solving questions on tests
- providing leadership in the development of national indicators and standards to assess and report on the achievement of Canadian students (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada School Achievement Indicators Program)
- participating in international testing projects to assess and report how well student achievement compares with other places in the world
- implementing a province-wide student information system so that we have solid information about students' progress and participation in school and can use that information to make decisions about needed changes in the education system
- developing and implementing indicators and measures to assess and improve educational performance, and providing Albertans with regular reports on educational standards and results

Enhancing the Curriculum

Curriculum sets out what our students need to know and be able to do in a changing world. Our curriculum must reflect high standards, the needs of students, and the needs of Alberta's society and economy. To achieve these objectives, priority will be placed on:

- implementing a results-based curriculum. This means that the provincial curriculum will clearly specify levels of learning and high expectations for our students
- developing Career and Technology Studies to provide students with a combination of academic and practical skills as preparation for future study and careers in highly skilled and technical fields
- providing high school diplomas and awards of excellence which recognize student accomplishments in areas of study such as the humanities, sciences, fine arts, business, and career and technology studies

Building Strong Basic Skills

Students need strong basic skills in reading, writing, computing and spelling as a foundation for understanding and applying their knowledge. To achieve this objective, priority will be placed on:

- implementing early intervention programs (such as Head Start) for at-risk pre-school children and their parents
- emphasizing basic skills in all areas of the curriculum. This means schools and teachers will provide more opportunities for students to develop their abilities to communicate well verbally and in writing, and to spell and compute

Encouraging Students to Stay in School

Students must stay in school to get the education they need to be successful. The graduation rate must be improved and the dropout rate must be reduced. To achieve these objectives, priority will be placed on:

- enhancing programs for students at risk. This means working with school jurisdictions to implement programs that improve basic skills, attendance, motivation, self-esteem, and the success of students at risk of dropping out of school
- improving the coordination of programs offered by government and community agencies and assisting school jurisdictions to improve the availability of coordinated, school-based family and community services. This means students have the supports they need to succeed in school

- implementing a provincial stay-in-school strategy targeted at significant annual reductions in the dropout rate

Within these initiatives, particular attention will be given to improving the results for Native students.

Doing What's Best For Disabled Students

Integration into the regular classroom must be the norm for special needs students so that they get the programs and services they need to succeed to the best of their abilities. To achieve this objective, priority will be placed on:

- developing and implementing an integration policy for Alberta that puts the focus on doing what's best to meet the needs of each individual child

Building a Strong Future in Science

Students need strong backgrounds in science and must be able to use science and technology to understand and improve society. Given the importance of science in a rapidly changing world, more students should be encouraged to pursue careers in science-related fields. To achieve these objectives, priority will be placed on:

- improving science programs for students to develop higher achievement and stronger student interest and skills in science
- establishing, with the help of business and industry, specialized science and technology schools, either public or private, to provide opportunities for students to develop exceptional abilities in science

Enhancing Teaching

Teachers are the key to excellence in our schools. We must support and empower teachers to meet the diverse and changing needs of students and to improve students' results. To achieve these objectives, priority will be placed on:

- focusing on training and professional development of teachers to improve their ability to assess student learning needs and achievement, and to adapt their teaching to be more specific to the needs of each student
- revising teacher certification requirements to ensure they reflect the most current knowledge about effective teaching practices

Improving Equity of Opportunity for Students

All children, regardless of their social or cultural background or the wealth of the community in which they live, must have equitable opportunities to get the education they need. To achieve this objective, priority will be placed on:

- developing and implementing effective solutions to the problem of inequities across school jurisdictions so that all have the fiscal resources they need to meet their students' needs

Enhancing Partnerships

Education is no longer just the business of educators. Parents, students, business leaders and community members must be actively involved in making decisions about education. To achieve this objective, priority will be placed on:

- making sure that parents are well-informed about educational standards and results, and have opportunities to be more actively involved in schools and in decisions about the education of their children
- encouraging active partnerships between businesses and schools to provide opportunities for students to learn about the workplace, and opportunities for businesses to be more actively involved in education

Next Steps

Achieving the objectives of this plan of action will be a challenging task. It will take the energy and commitment of all who have a stake in a successful education system to do what must be done to make the Plan work.

In the months ahead, there will be ongoing discussion with all partners about the vision statement, this Action Plan, and implementation steps.

We will be regularly asking and reporting what is being done and what has been achieved. We will share the information required to assess our mutual progress and to inform Albertans about the results we are achieving to improve education for our students. And we will report where we need to do better. Our first report to Albertans will be in November, 1991. It will speak clearly to the steps we are taking together to achieve our mission.

"The best possible education for all Alberta students"

Alberta Education Mission Statement

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